



# Reading German Church Records

Intermediate Handwriting Seminar

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Church baptisms, marriages, and deaths can be in many different formats. The three most common formats are:

- **Register-style:** handwritten or pre-printed tables where each column in the entry is filled in.
- **Brief paragraph-style:** short entries written as a sentence, these contain the most important components of the event. Look for key words to identify each element.
- **Full paragraph-style:** reminiscent of Napoleonic code-style entries, these can contain some legalese, including registration dates.

## BAPTISM RECORDS

### Vocabulary

German	English Translation
Kirchenbuch	church book register
evangelisch	Lutheran
katholisch	Catholic
Taufen	baptisms
getauft	baptized
Vater / Mutter	father / mother
Tochter / Sohn	daughter / son
(Tauf)/Zeugen / Gevätern	witnesses
unehelich	illegitimate

### Contents

German baptism records usually include:

- Date of baptism (sometimes the date of birth is also included)
- Name of the child
- Names of the parents (earlier records sometimes only list the father)
- Names of witnesses or godparents

# MARRIAGE RECORDS

## Vocabulary

German	English Translation
<b>Trauung / Ehe / Heirat</b>	marriage
<b>ledig</b>	single
<b>Junggesell</b>	bachelor
<b>Jungfrau</b>	maiden / spinster
<b>Witwe / Witwer</b>	widow / widower
<b>Sohn / Tochter</b>	Son / Daughter
<b>von / aus</b>	from / out of (place of origin)
<b>in / zu</b>	in / at (place of residence)
<b>dahier / hier</b>	here (in this location)

## Contents

German marriage records usually include:

- Date of marriage (sometimes the date of the publication of banns is also given)
- Names of the groom and the bride
- Names of the father or previous spouse
  - Later records give both parents' names (post-1800s)
- Place of origin of the groom and the bride

Marriage records can sometimes also include:

- Age
- Birthdate and place
- Witnesses to the marriage

When looking at marriage records, you can break up each entry into at least two sections, one for the groom and one for the bride. Look for the connecting word **mit** (with) or **und** (and) to help differentiate between the two sections.

For long paragraph-style marriage records, there can be multiple sections, including:

- Information about the banns and permissions of the marriage (usually the first section)
- The groom's information
- The bride's information
- Information about the witnesses to the marriage
- Legalese confirmation that the marriage took place
- Signatures of the groom, bride, witnesses, and officiator

# BURIAL RECORDS

## Vocabulary

German	English Translation
Tote	death
sterben / gestorben	died
begraben / bestattet	buried
Witwe / Witwer	widow / widower
(Ehe)Mann	husband
(Ehe)Frau / Hausfrau / (Ehe)Weib	wife
Alter	age
Jahr (J) / Monat (M) / Tag (T)	year / month / day

## Contents

German burial records usually include:

- Date of burial (sometimes the date of death is also included)
- Name of the deceased
- Relationship to the family head (spouse or father)
  - Later entries (post-1800) may contain the names of both parents and spouse
- Place of origin (if not stated, usually local)
- Age of the deceased (sometimes the birthdate and place are also included)

## RESEARCH TIPS

- **Illegible letter?** Scan other records; look at words you know to compare letters
- **In German, names and nouns should always be capitalized.** These can help you identify how the priest writes his capital letters.
- **Illegible date?** Look before and after; entries are almost always chronological.
- **Trying to decide if the word is important?** Look before and after; if the word appears in every entry, it is not specific to your entry.
- **Each priest had his own formulaic style of writing entries.** Compare multiple entries to understand the scribe's flow.
- **Names, particularly surnames, are often underlined or written in Roman script.** This makes it easier to browse through the records for a name, as they often stand out.
- **Look at the front or back of the book for a handwritten index.**